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SUBJECT: CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION CONTINUES IN TURKEY'S SOUTHEAST

1. (SBU) Two Turkish Christian representatives visited AMCON Adana on October 19 to report on difficulties they have experienced in carrying out their religious practices. Guldane Migi from Adana and Huseyin Yelki from Malatya told ConOffs that they believed they had been treated prejudicially by authorities because they were Christians. Migi, an accountant, organizes small-scale Christian activities in economically less advantaged parts of Adana's Yuregir district. Migi complained that recent attempts to change his religious preference from Muslim to Christian on his official identity card had been rejected by authorities. He claimed that this rejection stemmed from a 2003 Interior Ministry decree. Migi also mentioned that local officials often failed to grant work permits to foreigners he, as their accountant and business facilitator, had been involved with by not handling their applications for inordinately long periods, or by outright refusal without explanation.

2. (SBU) Yelki, a sales representative for Kayra, a small Christian publishing house in Malatya, told ConOffs that numerous attempts to place Christian books in local bookstores had met with official censure. Yelki said that two weeks ago officers of the Malatya-garrisoned Second Army visited bookstores in Malatya and successfully pressured store owners to remove the Christian books from their shelves. He also reported that plain clothes police officers visited his publishing house's office to check for "unauthorized or pirate books" and asked what the company's goal was in selling the books. Yelki said that officials were concerned about both Turkish and Kurdish language Christian materials, e.g. Kurdish-language Bibles.

3. (SBU) Yelki mentioned that Malatya officials had refused his company the opportunity to exhibit their Christian books in a local religious book fair every year for the past three years. Every book displayed at the fair was about Islam, specifically Sunni Islam, Yelki said. He emphasized that official pressure, societal prejudice and censoring of Christian materials had made it impossible for Kayra to stay in business (Note: Yelki estimated annual books sales at only 500 to 600 copies. End Note.)

4. (SBU) Local Muslim leaders have been publicly speaking out against Christians, said Yelki. In May, one Malatya mufti declared that Christian missionaries were trying to destroy Turkish society; that the missionaries were turning Turkey into a Christian land by returning to the tactics of the Crusades. Yelki reported that his office manager, a South African Christian, and he have met with the local muftuluk leaders on three occasions over the past year, but have failed to get them to cease their public anti-Christian declarations.

5. (SBU) Comment: Post continues to monitor reported instances of religious discrimination and persecution by officials in southeast Turkey. Unfortunately, instances like those reported to us by Migi and Yelki are still common occurrences throughout the region. End Comment.

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